

Radio Broadcasting Part 5: Growth of FM Stations and Increasing Corporate Ownership ^[1]

Radio Broadcasting

by Philip McFee and Wiley J. Williams, 2006

See also: [Durham Life Insurance Company](#) ^[2]; [Jefferson-Pilot Corporation](#) ^[3].

[Part 1: North Carolina's First Radio Stations](#) ^[4], [Part 2: Radio Enters Its "Golden Age" in North Carolina](#) ^[5], [Part 3: National Networks and Popular Local Shows and Personalities](#) ^[6], [Part 4: Radio Broadcasting and the Civil Rights Movement](#) ^[7], [Part 5: Growth of FM Stations and Increasing Corporate Ownership](#)

Growth of FM Stations and Increasing Corporate Ownership

The 1960s ushered in a change in broadcasting, less in its content than in its manner of presentation. Due to the continuing success of television, radio stations began to leave behind serials and soap operas in favor of format broadcasting more suitable to the medium. This change was hastened by the [Federal Communications Commission](#) ^[8] (FCC) ruling that stations no longer could simulcast on both AM and FM bands, necessitating a split in content. The 1960s comprised the era of the Top-40 giants, and new start-up stations, such as the [jazz](#) ^[9]-[gospel](#) ^[10] WSHA at [Shaw University](#) ^[11] (the first black college in America to own a radio station), emphasized genre-based programming. Talk radio, which had regained its popularity in the 1950s, continued to flourish, with stations including NPR-affiliate [WUNC](#) ^[12] rallying behind esteemed commentators like Carl Kassel and Charles Kuralt. Rekindling the torch of its earlier station WLAC, college station [WKNC](#) ^[13] resumed broadcasting from [North Carolina State](#) ^[14], where it remained into the twenty-first century.

With the dissolution of the right to simulcast and the refocusing of content on individual stations, the 1970s harkened the close of the second Golden Age of Radio Broadcasting, said to have begun in the mid-1950s. The FM band, with its possibilities for taste-specific commercial programming and increased sound integrity, became immensely popular in the state at the beginning of the decade. By 1971 eight FM stations were on the air in the [Triangle area](#) ^[15] alone. AM still carried on, and in 1970 the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters created its [Hall of Fame](#) ^[16], which that same year inducted Charles Crutchfield, among others. By 2005 the hall boasted more than 80 members, including inductee Woody Durham-the "Voice of the Tar Heels"-whose career had begun in the 1970s.

North Carolina radio in the 1980s was much more independent than it had been in decades past. Broadcast power increased, giving 1970s start-ups such as WDCG, "Durham's Country Giant" (1974), and classical broadcaster [WCPE](#) ^[17] (1978) a chance to thrive. The FCC relaxed its rules, permitting "big stick" antennas-potent arrays rising more than 1,000 feet and capable of surpassing 100,000-watt signals-to power their way, at times, into other parts of the country. This free-market mind frame also saw format stations going head-to-head on the dial, as genres were no longer exclusive to a single station. In 1994 the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) ^[18]'s [WXYC](#) ^[19] found a new way to broadcast its signal, becoming the first station ever to launch a streaming Internet broadcast.

By 2006 North Carolina hosted more than 400 radio stations representing innumerable genres. As the industry diversifies, however, the need for strength in conglomeration once again becomes prevalent beyond regional suppliers such as Jefferson-Pilot. San Antonio's [Clear Channel Communications, Inc.](#) ^[20], is the front-runner of the new corporate consolidation mode of radio management. In 2006 the company owned more than 1,200 radio stations in the United States, 22 of which were in North Carolina. [Infinity Radio](#) ^[21], a subsidiary of the massive [Viacom Corporation](#) ^[22], also owned 9 radio stations in the state. Some independents still thrive, but consolidation comes with the promise of more protection against government regulation.

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Kay Kyser and his band entertain U.S. Navy personnel during a live NBC radio broadcast of Kay Kyser's College of Musical Knowledge, ca. 1943. North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library.

In 1931 Raleigh radio station WPTF broadcast the marriage of Felton Williams and Peggy Fussell. Courtesy of North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

Subjects:

[21st Century \(2001-present\)](#) ^[27]

[Media](#) ^[28]

[Post War 20th Century \(1946-2000\)](#) ^[29]

[Radio](#) ^[30]

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